

Holbrook – A Short Story

Gary had read on the net that he'd died in a massive earthquake that wiped out Palmdale. It was just his old buddy Fleataxi TRYING to be funny, again. Gary told everyone to call him Sam, an obvious reference to Samuel Clemens, who had once said, "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated."

Despite having built a veritable fortress in Palmdale, the three men were worried that they would get caught with all of the illegal guns and grenades under Gary's slab. They worried about it a lot, as a matter of fact, and finally, Gary suggested, one more time, that they move to Holbrook, Arizona.

No one knew what Gary's fascination was with Holbrook. Gary probably wasn't even sure himself if the truth were known. It was just so rural, yeah, that was it; it was rural. And, there wasn't a fault line 3 miles from anywhere in Holbrook and Arizona even allowed a person to own real guns. Well, maybe not the 100 or so AK-47's and the Chinese grenades, but you could own a M1A with the original flashhider and 20-round magazines if you could afford them.

Besides, there was that land Gary had found in doing research for one of his stories. The three old geezers and their wives decided to drive over to Holbrook on a sort of mini-vacation. There was the Painted Desert to see, and the Meteor Crater over by Winslow and all kinds of the usual sightseeing stuff. They needed a break anyway, having single handedly won the war against the UN.

So, they set off to see the sites and check out that property. It was unusually humid for some reason and it seemed as if they swam all the way to Holbrook. Gary chain smoked those 'waterproof' cigarettes of his the whole way, but had to give up in Flagstaff and buy a new Bic, his just wouldn't light. When they finally got to Holbrook, they got a motel and Gary called the number for those lots in the Sun Valley Development 7 miles east of Holbrook. They didn't need an appointment, they could come by anytime, so he kept quiet, they could check out the property after the sightseeing was done.

Gary hadn't bookmarked the listing for those lots and it wasn't until he copied a portion of the description from his story into the search engine that he was able to find the ad again. The ad on the net said:

This mile-high (5,200') desert property has a 360-degree panoramic view:

from the PETRIFIED FOREST to the South and East; the PAINTED DESERT to the North and East; the LITTLE COLORADO RIVER VALLEY to the North and West; the towering SAN FRANCISCO PEAKS near Flagstaff to the West; and the MOGOLLION RIM's wonderland vacation area extending from the Southwest, back to the Southeast

They would use the ad as their guide and check out the Petrified Forest and the Painted Desert. Better see the stuff up close and personal and then look at the lots to see if they really were as represented. So, they went sightseeing.

The Meteor Crater was just a big hole in the ground as far as Gary was concerned. And, he'd seen petrified wood in a dozen different states. These rocks looked just like the other rocks. Big deal. Painted Desert? A bunch of pretty rocks, but he didn't see any paintbrush marks. Finally, they'd seen all of the sights and went to check out the real estate.

You couldn't really see any of those sights. Gary rechecked the ad. Oh, it said you could see the property from those places, not the other way around. Figured, they must have a lawyer or a politician or a reporter writing their ads. On the other hand, it wasn't bad property. Buy 1 acre, put a medium priced (\$50,000) doublewide mobile home on it and you still had room for extras. Like the 4 550-gallon propane tanks, the 3,000-gallon water tank, you know, the extras. Gary sprung for dinner at the Mexican restaurant, prepared to do a massive selling job on Ron and Clarence.

"You know Gary," Clarence said, "I could see Lucy and me with a modestly priced doublewide on an acre of land. I think maybe we ought to move to Holbrook."

"Me too partner," Ron said, "But I think maybe Linda and I would get 2½ acres and set a triple wide on it."

Gary didn't know what to say. Finally, "We'll why don't we buy 5 acres and divide it up. I'll take the oddball 1½ acre parcel," he managed to get out.

"There you go partner," Ron said, "Who's buying?"

"Uh, supper or the land?" Gary asked.

"Both," Ron and Clarence chorused, laughing.

"I've got supper," Gary hurriedly responded, "But I'm going to have to stretch just to get up the \$6,900 for the acre and a half."

They contacted the property owner in Mesa, AZ and made an appointment to see this Clark Allen fella at American Savings Life Insurance Company about the land. The ad said only \$150 down and payments of only \$75 a month for 59 months. Yeah right, that was per acre. And after Gary decided to buy the 5 acres and sell the parcels to Ron and Clarence, he learned that he would need a co-signer, something about his credit...

Ron and Clarence co-signed and Gary plunked down the \$750. They were property owners! (Well, in 59 more months.) At least the loan was interest free! (Unless you missed a payment, then it was 27%.) When they got home, Gary began to read the fine print in the contract. You could have an LP tank, that was good, but you could only have

one, that was bad. You couldn't have a water tank that was bad. You couldn't raise livestock either. Oh, and the parcels had to be divided evenly, 5-acres, 2½ acres or 1¼ acres. Well, Gary and Clarence would just have to split a 2½ parcel. Hmm, it was a land sale contract, and you couldn't do this or that or the other thing until you owned the property.

Gary called his banker in Iowa and Matt told him that they couldn't help him out, sorry. "Well, I'll just sell some of those AK-47's I have stored," Gary thought. The sad news was that everyone and his brother had a couple of the AK's salted away and you couldn't get \$100 for them. In fact, you could buy Chinese grenades for \$10 a pop and there were even some RPG's available fairly cheaply. Mortars? Yep, them, too. But they were \$100 each.

Gary sold off his LP tanks and his water tank at a loss. Ron and Clarence managed to get back what they'd put in theirs, go figure. They listed their homes, but the real estate market was in the dumps and they sold their homes for a lot less than they wanted. That was ok, they had enough money to pay off the loans, pay off the land and buy mobile homes. At least with the Sun Valley property paid for, they had some flexibility. Each man saw to the setting of his own home. Gary wanted a basement, but not under the house. They poured runners to set his house on and he had them dig a big hole, 12' deep by 16' wide by 54' long. They moved over to Sun Valley and into their new homes.

Gary and Sharon scrimped and saved and eventually had enough money to put in a 5,500-gallon propane tank. Well, you could only have one tank, but the fine print didn't say anything about the size of that one tank. They couldn't fill it, but they had 1,000-gallons. Gary had mounted his automatic transfer switch and had wired it in, only getting shocked a couple of times. Ron was a sport and plumbed the LP tank to the generator and to a valve so they could switch the house from natural gas to propane. Gary didn't know why Ron did that they didn't have natural gas anyway. At least he had all of those 5, 10 and 20-gallon tanks of propane to keep them going until they put the big tank in.

They scrimped and saved some more and Gary found a used 3,000-gallon water tank. He wished he'd gotten that much for his. They set the tank in the hole and Ron ran water pipes to connect the tank into the water supply. Gary spent many hours shoveling dirt over the tank, hoping no one noticed it before he got it covered over. The problem was the vent valve. Finally, Ron told Gary just to put in a coupler and add a section of pipe to get the vent to ground level. Now, why hadn't he thought of that? Gary decided he'd start his basement on his own and started buying bags of premix, a few at a time. He'd done one thing right; the septic system was deep enough that he could drain the basement into the septic tank.

Ron and Clarence finally took pity on Gary and they helped him put in the PVC drainage pipes and copper pipes for the water under the basement slab. You had to give Gary credit, he was determined, if nothing else. Of course, he looked 70, not the 65-years he'd actually lived, but he was getting there. He had a wheelbarrow and he mixed the premix a bag at a time and finally got the slab in. Lucky him, it was even level. Too lev-

el, the water didn't run to the center drain the way it should! Oh, well. Gary and Sharon then started to buy concrete block and when they had enough and money to pay to have it laid; they had a couple of illegal aliens from Holbrook put in the block walls. By golly, as soon as he had a roof on the 44'x16'x8' basement, he'd have his 'shelter'. (The tank used up 10' of the space he had intended to use for the basement.)

The roof was going to be a problem. Gary had intended to have one poured, but when he found out how much that cost, he abandoned that idea. He decided to use 2"x12"x16' rafters 12" on center. He got the lumber and slowly built the roof over the basement. Then, he laid ¾" OSB on the rafters, 2 sheets thick. Overkill? Maybe, but why take a chance. He got some pails of a tar like substance and painted the walls of the basement and the roof. Then, he applied tarpaper and another layer of tar. Finally, he cut in a stair well (should have done that before he did the tar) and started shoveling dirt again.

Gary took a couple of weeks off just to catch his breath. That was hard to do, too. He was up to 4 packs a day. A lot of help his 'friends' had been. But, they'd be there when TSHTF, he'd bet. The only survival food they had was 50# of pinto beans and 100# of rice that Sharon refused to eat.

Gary sank the next money into electrical wiring. He got the basement wired without a problem and only got shocked when he'd hooked the panel into the main panel in the house. Then they started going to garage sales and junkyards and finally got the basement all equipped as a shelter.

My goodness what a shelter it was too. It had an armory with about 100 AK-47's, and all of Gary's personal firearms. There were thousands and thousands of rounds of ammunition. And, those Chinese hand grenades, don't forget. He set up his radio room next and put his computer in his radio room. Sharon wouldn't let him near her computer except when she had a problem, almost daily, so whenever he wanted to surf the net, he had to get dressed, go to the basement and bring up that darned slow dialup connection.

It was downhill from there, they'd climbed the mountain. Sharon started to stock the basement slowly with the food she liked. Gary had his pinto beans and rice, she said, she was buying food she liked. Finally after a year of careful shopping, the shelter was stocked and ready to go. "Come on fire, flood or tornado, I'm ready," Gary thought.

That night, going down the basement stairs to get on the net, he tripped and fell, hitting his head. His last conscious thought before he passed on was, "I wonder when the big one is going to hit?"

They cremated Gary's body after the funeral according to his wishes. He'd wanted the funeral, just to say goodbye. Everyone commented how Gary looked 80, despite being only 66 years old.

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